

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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AUSTIN TO SERVE ON COMMITTEE STUDYING LICENSE BRANCH ISSUES

INDIANAPOLIS – State Rep. Terri J. Austin (D-Anderson) has been chosen to serve on a legislative committee set up to study issues surrounding the operation of Indiana's license branches and recent decisions by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) to close facilities in Elwood and other locations.

In the months leading up to the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly, Austin will serve on two groups: the Interim Study Committee on Motor Vehicle Issues and the board of directors for the Corporation for Educational Technology. Assignments were announced recently by legislative leadership, including House Democrat Leader B. Patrick Bauer from South Bend.

"These interim study committees do the background research on many of the major issues that the Legislature considers in a session," Austin said. "I am particularly pleased to be taking part in a committee that will be studying the current state of license branches in Indiana, because this will certainly be one of the 2006 session's major issues."

The committee itself was the brainchild of Indiana Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Garton (R-Columbus), who was the focal point on a controversy involving Gov. Mitch Daniels and BMV Commissioner Joel Silverman that erupted when the agency announced plans earlier this year to shut more than two dozen branches across the state.

"If anything, the high-handed manner in which Commissioner Silverman has handled these announcements and closings has paved the way for this committee to come into existence," Austin said. "It was very upsetting to see that branches were being shut down without any serious consideration of the impact these decisions will have on the public. State law requires public hearings before any branch closures, but as the people of Elwood could tell you, those hearings were only a mere formality, and the commissioner's mind was made up before they took place.

"As a result, Commissioner Silverman came across as rude and condescending to the public, factors that portrayed both the governor and him in a very bad light," she continued. "That situation was aggravated when the BMV elected to keep a branch open in the district represented by Sen. Garton, and Commissioner Silverman admitted that the senator's position in legislative leadership was the major reason for the switch. That raises the specter that pure politics is playing a role in this entire affair."

The committee will study the criteria for closing branches, personnel issues and the proposed implementation of the "State Tracking Record System" (STAR) information technology.

"It is my hope that we will be able to use this study committee to emphasize to the commissioner and this administration that we must operate government in a manner that benefits the public, rather than antagonizes them," Austin said. "I will be interested to see if the administration embraces this concept or chooses to be belligerent. In that case, I certainly would expect greater legislative oversight of the BMV to become a hot issue in 2006."

Austin's second interim assignment places her on a board that advises the governor and the state superintendent of public instruction on education-related technology initiatives and administers "The Buddy System Project."

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